



Active Insight: Evidence in Action

Tip #398



Small-Sided Games for Learning

Overview

Small-sided games in Years 3–10 support students to apply movement skills and strategies frequently. Increased involvement enhances decision-making, builds confidence, and improves engagement. This approach promotes meaningful participation and learning. It also provides more opportunities for students to practise skills, respond to game situations, and develop tactical understanding through active and inclusive physical activity experiences.

Key Teaching Ideas

Use small-sided formats to maximise involvement and learning opportunities. Adjust numbers and space. Support engagement, helping students practise and apply strategies effectively. Encourage frequent decision-making, communication, and active participation so students can build confidence, refine skills, and develop tactical awareness within dynamic game environments. Modify rules, equipment, or player roles when needed to ensure inclusive participation and provide appropriate challenge for all learners.

Practical Application

- Use three versus three games increasing touches and decision opportunities consistently
- Reduce team sizes supporting active participation and engagement levels effectively
- Adjust space supporting appropriate challenge and tactical learning outcomes
- Rotate teams maintaining involvement and varied learning experiences consistently
- Use multiple games ensuring continuous activity and participation opportunities

Next Steps

Use small-sided formats consistently. [Game Sense](#) approaches maximise engagement, decision-making, and meaningful learning in physical education.

The Game Sense model is informed by Teaching Games for Understanding (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982), the Game Sense approach (Light, 2013), and contemporary skill acquisition research including ecological dynamics (Davids & Renshaw).

